

METAPHYSICS AND *SEPARATIO* ACCORDING TO THOMAS AQUINAS

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CONSIDERABLE attention has been paid in recent years to the intellectual processes involved in one's explicit discovery of being, especially of being as real or existing, according to Thomas Aquinas. Inspired in large measure by the work of E. Gilson and also of J. Maritain, many recent commentators on Thomas have stressed the role of the mind's second operation, often referred to as judgment, when it comes to one's discovery of being as existing. Judgment, it is argued, is required if one is not to have an incomplete notion of being, a notion of being that would be reducible to the level of an essence or quiddity. Only judgment can assure one that one's notion of being embraces being as existing, an *est* as well as an *id quod*, an "is" as well as a "that which."¹

Some attention has also been devoted to a particular kind of judgment or a particular form of the intellect's second operation, sometimes named *separatio* by Thomas. Important editions of questions 5 and 6 of Thomas's commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius in 1948 and 1955 and the groundbreaking study by L. B. Geiger in 1947,² all have set the stage for further emphasis on this distinctive

¹ On this see, for instance, E. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2d ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), chap. 6, "Knowledge and Existence," pp. 190–215; *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 40–45; J. Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* (New York: Pantheon, 1948), pp. 22–35; J. Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1963), pp. 45–56, 249–58; *An Interpretation of Existence* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968), chap. 2, "Grasp of Existence," pp. 14–43; "Judgment and Truth in Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 22 (1970): 139–58.

² As will be seen below, questions 5 and 6 of this commentary are the most important sources for any study of *separatio* in Thomas. For an edition of these questions based on Thomas's autograph see *Thomas von Aquin. In Librum Boethii de Trinitate. Quaestiones Quinta et Sexta*, ed. P. Wyser (Fribourg: Société Philosophique-Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1948). For a critical edition of Thomas's entire commentary on the Boethian work see *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Expositio super Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, ed. B. Decker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955; reissued in 1959). For Geiger see his "Abstraction et séparation d'après s. Thomas *In de Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 31 (January 1947): 3–40; also, his *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, 2d ed. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1953), pp. 318–21.

type of intellectual operation when it comes to one's discovery of being, or better, of that notion of being that can serve as subject of a science of being as being rather than a science of being as material or as quantified. While this new development has remained largely unnoticed in certain regions of Thomistic scholarship for a number of years, it has been pursued in depth by other writers.³ At the same time, investigation of the same nicely dovetails with the renewed emphasis on existence and on judgment as the process required to discover being as existing to which we have referred above. For as will be seen below, at least one passage in Thomas's commentary (question 5, article 3) reinforces the contention that one must pass beyond simple apprehension to the mind's second operation or to judgment if one is to grasp being explicitly as existing. This particular point, however, is not our primary concern here.

In this study we wish to concentrate on questions relating to *separatio* as such insofar as it is involved in one's discovery of being as being, that is to say, of being as presupposed for a science of being as being, a metaphysics. For the sake of simplicity we shall consider this issue in three steps: 1) an historical review of the textual evidence pointing to a distinctive teaching with respect to *separatio* in Thomas; 2) an effort (also historical) to determine what is presupposed by Aquinas for the judgment known as *separatio* to function, that is to say, the kind of knowledge presupposed for one's discovery of being as being; 3) a more theoretical discussion of the possibility of *separatio* without prior awareness that immaterial and/or divine being exists.

I

Questions 5 and 6 of Thomas's commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius are our richest source of information with re-

³ For some of these see R. Schmidt, "L'emploi de la séparation en métaphysique," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 58 (1960): 376-93. See pp. 373-75 for earlier treatments of the same. Among these earlier treatments, Schmidt rightly stresses the importance of that by L.-M. Regis, "Un livre: La philosophie de la nature. Quelques 'Apories'," *Etudes et Recherches* 1 (1936): 127-56. See in particular pp. 134-38. Also, L. Sweeney, *A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 307-329. See pp. 307-308, nn. 13, 15, 16 for other literature on the topic. Also, J. Owens, "Metaphysical Separation in Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 34 (1972): 287-306. See p. 302, n. 39 for references to other studies of the same. Also S. Neumann, *Gegenstand und Methode der theoretischen Wissenschaften nach Thomas von Aquin aufgrund der Expositio super Librum Boethii De Trinitate* (Münster: Aschen-dorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), pp. 72-97, 145-51.

spect to his views on the proper division of and relationship between the theoretical sciences. This commentary originates from his first Parisian teaching period and can be dated between 1255 and 1259 (1258–1259, according to Weisheipl).⁴ In any event, therefore, it is a relatively early work in Thomas's career. To refer to it as a "commentary" is somewhat misleading, for it is far more than that. A few lines taken from the *De Trinitate* serve as the occasion for Thomas's deeply personal reflection on the points at issue, and in questions 5 and 6, for his development of his own views on the nature and divisions of the theoretical sciences. Even the Latin title found in various early catalogues of his works, *Expositio in librum Boethii de Trinitate*, only partly indicates the true nature of this writing.⁵

Here no attempt will be made to provide a complete summary of questions 5 and 6 of this commentary. We shall limit ourselves to some brief remarks pertaining to question 5, article 1, and shall then move on to a consideration of question 5, article 3. In question 5, article 1, the issue is raised as to whether speculative science is appropriately divided into three parts, natural philosophy, mathematics, and what Thomas there, following the text of Boethius, calls "divine science."⁶ His answer, of course, is in the affirmative. This is an appropriate division of speculative science. The criterion proposed to justify this division is of interest, for it is based upon the degree to which an object of theoretical science, a *speculabile*, depends on or is free from matter and motion. As Thomas phrases it, separation from matter and motion or connection with the same pertains to an object of theoretical science considered precisely as such. Therefore, theoretical sciences are differentiated according to the degree of freedom from matter and motion of their respective objects (*speculabilia*).⁷

Thomas then goes on to apply this criterion. Some objects of speculation depend on matter for their very being (*secundum esse*) since they can exist only in matter. Among these he introduces a

⁴ See Wyser, "Einleitung," pp. 17–18, for the 1255–1259 dating. For Weisheipl see his *Friar Thomas d'Aquino. His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 381 and 136–37.

⁵ On this see Wyser, "Einleitung," pp. 3–4.

⁶ Decker ed., p. 161. (All citations will be from this edition.)

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 165. 1–15. See in particular: "Sic ergo speculabili, quod est obiectum scientiae speculativae, per se competit separatio a materia et motu vel applicatio ad ea. Et ideo secundum ordinem remotioris a materia et motu scientiae speculativae distinguuntur" (12–15).

subdivision. Some depend on matter not only for their being, but also in order to be understood. By these he has in mind those objects of theoretical knowledge whose definition includes sensible matter. Sensible matter, matter insofar as it is subject to sensible qualities, is necessarily involved in one's understanding of such an object of theoretical science. Thus flesh and bones are included in one's understanding of man. Physics or natural science treats of such objects, according to Thomas.⁸

Other objects of theoretical science (*speculabilia*) while also depending on matter for their being, do not depend on sensible matter in order to be understood or defined, continues Aquinas. Such is true of lines and numbers, in short, of the kinds of things studied by mathematics. Common sensible matter, that is, matter insofar as it can be grasped by the senses, is not included in the definition of mathematics. Yet, according to Thomas, such mathematics can never in fact exist apart from matter, not even apart from sensible matter.⁹

In contrast with objects of theoretical knowledge that depend on matter and motion, Thomas now refers to another kind. Some objects of theoretical knowledge do not even depend upon matter for their being (*esse*). These are of two types, those that are never found in matter (God and angels), and those that are found in matter in certain cases but not in others (substance, quality, being [*ens*], potency, act, the one and the many, and things of this kind).¹⁰ Thomas goes on to observe that the science that treats of all of these is called "theology" or "divine science," also "metaphysics," and also "first philosophy." Without pausing here to examine in detail his three reasons for these three different titles, let it suffice for us to stress one

⁸ Decker ed., p. 165. 16–21. On Thomas's understanding of common sensible matter see L.-M. Régis, "Un livre: La philosophie de la nature," p. 146, and other references cited there. Thus in one passage from his commentary on the *Metaphysics* Thomas defines it as follows: "Sensibilis (materia) quidem est, quae concernit qualitates sensibiles, calidum et frigidum, rarum et densum, et alia huiusmodi, cum qua quidem materia concreta sunt naturalia, sed ab ea abstrahunt mathematica" (*In 8 Met.*, l. 5, n. 1760).

⁹ Decker ed., p. 165. 21–24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165. 24–28. "Quaedam vero speculabilia sunt, quae non dependent a materia secundum esse, quia sine materia esse possunt, sive numquam sint in materia, sicut deus et angelus, sive in quibusdam sint in materia et quibusdam non, ut substantia, qualitas, ens, potentia, actus, unum et multa et huiusmodi.

point. These are three different names for one and the same science, that science whose subject is being as being or being in general.¹¹

One important point has been made with respect to our topic. According to Thomas there are two classes or types of *speculabilia* that do not depend on matter either to be or to be defined. God (and angels) constitute the first class. A whole host of what one might dub “metaphysicals” are listed as representative of the second, including, be it noted, substance and being. If, as Thomas holds elsewhere and as will be seen below, the subject of a science is that whose causes and properties one investigates in that science, and if as he also holds, *ens commune* or *ens inquantum ens* is the subject of metaphysics, a problem immediately arises. Must one presuppose the existence of the two kinds of *speculabilia* that do not depend on matter in the order of being if one is to begin metaphysics? In other words, will knowledge of the second type of “immaterial,” the “neutrally immaterial,” if one may so phrase it, be sufficient to begin metaphysics? Will knowledge of this kind of immaterial even be possible without presupposing the reality of the immaterial in the first or stronger and positive sense? In short, must one already know that positively immaterial being (God or angelic being) exists in order to discover beings as such or being as being?

Before leaving question 5, article 1, one more point should be noted. The sixth objection protests that a whole should not be divided from its parts. But divine science seems to be a whole with respect to physics and mathematics. The subjects of physics and mathematics (changeable substance and quantity, respectively) are parts of being, the subject of divine science. Therefore, divine science should not be contradistinguished from natural science and mathematics.¹²

Thomas begins his reply by conceding that the subjects of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 166. 1–6. On Thomas’s reasons for entitling this science “first philosophy” see our “The Title ‘First Philosophy’ according to Thomas Aquinas and his Different Justifications for the Same,” *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (March 1974): 585–600. On being as being or being in general as subject of this science see, for instance, in this same commentary on the *De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 6 (p. 171. 16–26); q. 5, a. 4 (pp. 194–95, esp., 194. 25–26); the “proemium” to Thomas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, and further discussion below in the present study.

¹² Decker ed., p. 162. 18–24.

physics and mathematics, changeable being and quantified being, are parts of being, and that being (*ens*) itself is the subject of metaphysics. Still, he counters, it does not follow that these other sciences are parts of metaphysics. For each particular science treats of one part of being in a special way (*secundum specialem modum considerandi*), distinct from the way in which metaphysics considers being. Therefore, the subject of the particular science is really not a part of the subject of metaphysics. For it is not a part of being from that standpoint under which being itself is the subject of metaphysics.¹³ In brief, then, metaphysics has as its subject being in general rather than being as restricted to the changeable or the quantitative. Moreover, it studies being as being rather than as changing or as quantified.

Thomas's reply is of interest for our immediate purposes because he is here treating of the second class of things that may be said to be separate from matter and motion, the neutrally immaterial, represented in this instance by being. He is suggesting that even changing being or quantified being can be studied by our science insofar as it is being, that is, from the standpoint of being.¹⁴ At the same time, of course, this reply again gives rise to the question: Must one presuppose the existence of immaterial being in the positive sense (God and/or angels) in order to study being as being rather than merely as changing or as quantified? Before attempting to discern Thomas's answer to this question, we shall first turn to question 5, article 3 of this same commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*.

In this article Thomas raises the question: Does mathematics treat, without matter and motion, of what exists in matter?¹⁵ He already has suggested in question 5, article 1 that mathematics does treat of such things. But in preparing to develop this position here

¹³ Ibid., p. 171. 16–24.

¹⁴ This point is important for it shows that even in the discussion of q. 5, a. 1 wherein Thomas has directed the reader's attention to the different kinds of *speculabilia* corresponding to the different theoretical sciences, he does not reduce the subject of a science to the sum-total of things considered therein. The subject also includes the formal perspective of that science, its distinctive *modus considerandi*. Thomas's reply to the seventh objection reinforces this same point (Decker ed., p. 171. 27–30). For more on his understanding of the subject of a science see A. Zimmerman, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Leiden-Köln: E. J. Brill, 1965), pp. 160–65.

¹⁵ "Utrum mathematica consideratio sit sine motu et materia de his quae sunt in materia" (Decker ed., p. 179).

he introduces some important precisions with respect to the intellectual processes involved in arriving at the distinctive subjects of each of the theoretical sciences. It is within this same general context that he presents key texts touching on *separatio*.

Thomas begins by observing that one must understand how the intellect in this operation is able to abstract (*abstrahere possit*) if one is to throw light on this question. Taking his cue from Aristotle's *De anima* he notes that according to the Philosopher the operation of the intellect is twofold. There is one operation whereby it knows what something is, called the understanding of indivisibles (*intelligentia indivisibilium*). There is another whereby it composes and divides, that is to say, by forming affirmative and negative propositions.¹⁶ Thomas then comments that these two intellectual operations correspond to two factors found in things. The first operation is directed toward a thing's nature, according to which it enjoys a certain rank, whether it be a complete thing or even an incomplete thing such as a part or an accident. The second operation has to do with a thing's *esse*, which results from the union of its principles in the case of composites, or accompanies the simple nature itself, as in the case of simple substances.¹⁷ Needless to say, this text, together with its parallels, strongly supports those who insist that for Thomas one must have recourse to judgment, not merely to simple apprehension, if one is to grasp being as existing or as real, or if one is to grasp existence as such.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 181. 17–182. 5. For Aristotle see *De anima* 3. 6 430a26–28.

¹⁷ "Et hae quidem duae operationes duobus, quae sunt in rebus, respondent. Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam naturam rei, secundum quam res intellecta aliquem gradum in entibus obtinet, sive sit res completa, ut totum aliquod, sive res incompleta, ut pars vel accidens. Secunda vero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei, quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei in compositis vel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus." Decker ed., p. 182. 5–12.

¹⁸ See the authors cited in n. 1 above. For a helpful survey of recent Thomistic discussions of judgment see A. McNicholl, "On Judging," *Thomist* 38 (October 1974): 789–824. This should be supplemented by recent studies by J. Owens cited above in n. 1 as well as by his "Aquinas on Knowing Existence," *Review of Metaphysics* 29 (June 1976): 670–90. For a rather critical evaluation of the Gilson position on this point see J. M. Quinn, *The Thomism of Etienne Gilson: A Critical Study* (Villanova, Pennsylvania: Villanova University Press, 1971), pp. 53–91. Quinn's evaluation of Gilson continues to be disputed and defended. See A. Maurer, review of *The Thomism of Etienne Gilson: A Critical Study*, by

So far, then, Thomas has been discussing two intellectual operations, often known as simple apprehension and judgment. While the first is directed towards a thing's nature or essence, the second has to do with its *esse*. Thomas had initiated this discussion by suggesting that one must investigate the various ways in which the intellect can *abstract*. Now, after this brief general reference to simple apprehension and judgment, he again turns to that issue. Since the truth of the intellect results from its conformity to reality, in its second operation (judgment) it cannot truly abstract (*abstrahere*) that which is in fact united in reality.¹⁹ This is so because when one abstracts according to this second operation he indicates that there is a corresponding separation (*separatio*) in reality. Thomas illustrates this with the case of a white man. If I say that he is not white, I assert that there is a separation in reality. If the man is indeed white, my judgment is erroneous.²⁰

Thomas contrasts the second operation of the intellect with the first on this score. According to the mind's first operation, he continues, one can indeed abstract things which are not separated in reality. This is true in certain cases although not in others. In brief, such is possible when and only when the intelligibility of that which is abstracted does not depend on the other thing with which

John M. Quinn, *Thomist* 37 (April 1973): 389–91; L. Kennedy, review of *The Thomism of Etienne Gilson: A Critical Study*, by John M. Quinn, *New Scholasticism* 49 (Summer 1975): 369–73; John Beach, "A Rejoinder to Armand A. Maurer's Review of *The Thomism of Etienne Gilson: A Critical Study* by John M. Quinn," *Thomist* 38 (January 1974): 187–91; and Beach, "Another Look at the Thomism of Etienne Gilson," *New Scholasticism* 50 (Autumn 1976): 522–28. For parallel texts in Thomas see *In 1 Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7 (Mandonnet ed., 1: 489): ". . . prima operatio respicit quidditatem rei; secunda respicit esse ipsius." Also, *In 1 Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, sol. (Mandonnet, 1: 903): "Cum in re duo sint quidditas rei, et esse eius, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus. Una quae dicitur a philosophis formatio, qua apprehendit quidditates rerum quae etiam a Philosopho, in III *De anima*, dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia. Alia autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex materia et forma compositae, a quo cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subiectum."

¹⁹ "Et quia veritas intellectus est ex hoc quod conformatur rei, patet quod secundum hanc secundam operationem intellectus non potest vere abstrahere quod secundum rem coniunctum est, quia in abstrahendo significaretur esse separatio secundum ipsum esse rei. . . ." (Decker ed., p. 182. 12–15).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182. 16–18.

it is united in reality.²¹ In judgment, however, one can never truthfully abstract that which is united in reality.

At this point Thomas introduces a new element into his theory of abstraction and separation:

Accordingly, through its various operations the intellect distinguishes one thing from another in different ways. Through the operation by which it composes and divides, it distinguishes one thing from another by understanding that the one does not exist in the other. Through the operation, however, by which it understands what a thing is, it distinguishes one thing from another by knowing what one is without knowing anything of the other, either that it is united to it or separated from it.

So this distinction is not properly called *separatio* (*separatio*), but only the first. It is correctly called *abstraction*, but only when the things of which one is known without the other, are one in reality (ital. ours).²²

Here, then, within the general context of the different ways in which the intellect can “distinguish” one thing from another, Thomas has differentiated between one kind of operation referred to as *separatio*, and another referred to as abstraction. Abstraction has now taken on a narrower meaning, being restricted to the intellect’s first operation. *Separatio* refers to the intellect’s second operation or judgment, and since it is a distinguishing or dividing operation, is often described by commentators on Thomas as a “negative judgment.”

Thomas goes on in this same article to distinguish two further subdivisions of abstraction taken in this strict and narrow sense, corresponding to two modes of union. To union of part and whole there corresponds the abstraction of the whole, the abstraction of the universal from the particular. To union of form (the accidental form of quantity) and its appropriate matter there corresponds abstraction of the form. Though Thomas’s development of these two types of abstraction is rather detailed, we shall here content ourselves

²¹ Ibid., p. 182–83.

²² See A. Maurer, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 3d ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), p. 30. For direct translations, we will follow Maurer. For the Latin see the Decker ed., p. 183. 23–31: “Sic ergo intellectus distinguit unum ab altero aliter et aliter secundum diversas operationes; quia secundum operationem, qua componit et dividit, distinguit unum ab alio per hoc quod intelligit unum alii non inesse. In operatione vero qua intelligit, quid est unumquodque, distinguit unum ab alio, dum intelligit, quid est hoc, nihil intelligendo de alio, neque quod sit cum eo, neque quod sit ab eo separatam. Unde ista distinctio non proprie habet nomen separationis, sed prima tantum. Haec autem distinctio recte dicitur abstractio, sed tunc tantum quando ea, quorum unum sine altero intelligitur, sunt simul secundum rem.”

with noting that he then correlates *separatio* and the two types of abstraction taken strictly with his threefold division of theoretical science.

We conclude that there are three kinds of distinction in the operation of the intellect. There is one through the operation of the intellect joining and dividing which is properly called separation, and this belongs to divine science or metaphysics.

There is another through the operation by which the quiddities of things are conceived which is the abstraction of form from sensible matter; and this belongs to mathematics.

And there is a third through the same operation which is the abstraction of a universal from a particular; and this belongs to physics and to all the sciences in general, because science disregards accidental features and treats of necessary matters.²³

In short, therefore, a particular kind of judgment, a negative judgment or *separatio* is here associated with the third degree of theoretical science, that is to say, with metaphysics.

In an effort to reconstruct Thomas's teaching on the discovery of *esse*, *separatio*, and the subject of metaphysics, it will be helpful for one to recall the following points.

First of all, by way of contrast with the mind's first operation, simple apprehension, its second operation or judgment is said to be directed towards a thing's *esse*. Given this, there is strong reason to suggest that an existential judgment or a judgment of existence has some role to play in one's discovery of being as existing according to Thomas.²⁴

Secondly, if one or a series of individual judgments of existence is (are) directed to objects that have originally been grasped by the senses, the subject of every such judgment will be concrete, material, and changing, that is, the kind of thing that can be grasped by the senses. If one stops at this point in formulating his notion of being, he will hardly have arrived at a notion of being as being rather than a

²³ Maurer trans., pp. 33–34. For the Latin see the Decker ed., p. 186. 13–21. "Sic ergo in operatione intellectus triplex distinctio invenitur. Una secundum operationem intellectus componentis et dividensis, quae separatio dicitur proprie; et haec competit scientiae divinae sive metaphysicae. Alia secundum operationem, qua formantur quidditates rerum, quae est abstractio formae a materia sensibili; et haec competit mathematicae. Tertia secundum eandem operationem [quae est abstractio] universalis a particulari; et haec competit etiam physicae et est communis omnibus scientiis, quia in scientia praetermittitur quod per accidens est et accipitur quod per se est."

²⁴ See n. 18 above and the references indicated therein as well as in n. 1.

notion of being as changing and material. Hence he will not yet be in a position to develop a science of being as being or being as such. He may have arrived at what might be termed a primitive notion of being, that is, being as restricted to the material and changing.²⁵

Thirdly, in order to overcome this restricted notion of being, appeal may be made to a negative judgment, or to Thomas's *separatio*. This seems to be why he asserts that *separatio* is characteristic of metaphysics, the science of being as being, while the subject-matters of the other theoretical sciences can be attained by some process of abstraction taken strictly, or simple apprehension.²⁶

As to identifying more precisely the role of *separatio*, our task would be considerably easier had Thomas devoted an article or question to its function as such. Lacking this, however, we may take our clues from a number of explicit references to *separatio* in question 5, article 3. As has been noted, it is a judging operation whereby one distinguishes one thing from another by understanding that the one is not found in the other.²⁷ In short, it is a negative judgment. Thomas also states that in the case of things that can exist separately, separation obtains rather than abstraction.²⁸ Hence, when he speaks most precisely, he carefully distinguishes it from abstraction. Again, he notes that substance, the intelligible matter of quantity, can exist without quantity. Therefore, the consideration of substance without quantity belongs to the order of separation rather than to that of abstraction.²⁹ It will be recalled that according to Thomas's treat-

²⁵ For some other contemporary interpreters of Thomas who also distinguish between this "primitive" notion of being and a truly metaphysical notion, see H. Renard, "What is St. Thomas' Approach to Metaphysics?" *New Scholasticism* 30 (January 1956): 73; A. M. Krapiec, "Analysis formationis conceptus entis existentialiter considerati," *Divus Thomas* (Piac.) 33 (July–September 1956): 341–44; G. W. Klubertanz, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 2d ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), pp. 45–52; R. W. Schmidt, "L'emploi de la séparation en métaphysique," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 58 (1960): 377–80.

²⁶ For helpful remarks on *separatio*'s role in detaching being from limited determinations see J.-D. Robert, "La métaphysique, science distincte de toute autre discipline philosophique, selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Divus Thomas* (Piac.) 50 (1947): 216–17.

²⁷ See q. 5, a. 3 as cited in n. 22 above.

²⁸ Decker ed., pp. 185. 31–186. 1. "In his autem quae secundum esse possunt esse divisa, magis habet locum separatio quam abstractio."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186. 10–12. "Substantia autem, quae est materia intelligibilis quantitatis, potest esse sine quantitate; unde considerare substantiam sine quantitate magis pertinet ad genus separationis quam abstractionis."

ment in question 5, article 1, substance and being were cited as instances of that which is found in matter in certain cases but not in others, that is to say, of that which is negatively or neutrally immaterial rather than positively immaterial.³⁰ Therefore, one may conclude that the consideration of being as such rather than as material or quantified pertains to *separatio* rather than to abstraction. Finally, we have seen that *separatio* belongs to metaphysics or to divine science. If one bears in mind that for Thomas metaphysics has as its subject being as being, that it treats of the kind of things that do not depend on matter either for their existence or to be defined, then it follows that for him *separatio* is the intellectual process whereby one attains to that particular kind of subject matter.

To express Thomas's understanding of *separatio* in other terms, then, it is the process through which the mind explicitly acknowledges and asserts that that by reason of which something is recognized as being need not be identified with that by which it is recognized as material being, or changing being, or being of a given kind. One may describe it as a negative judgment in that it denies that that by reason of which something is described as being is to be identified with that by reason of which it is being of a given kind, for instance, material and changing being, or quantified being, or, for that matter, spiritual being. One may describe it as *separatio* because by reason of this judgment one distinguishes or separates that intelligibility in virtue of which something is described as being from all lesser and more restrictive intelligibilities that indicate its kind of being. As a result of *separatio*, therefore, one asserts that in order for something to be or to be real, it need not be material or changing or quantified. Thus one asserts the negative immateriality, the neutral character, of being.

If one concedes that metaphysics is indeed the science of being as being and that its subject is being in general rather than this or that particular kind of being,³¹ then one can understand why Thomas

³⁰ See p. 434 of our text above.

³¹ For some other texts wherein Thomas distinguishes the metaphysician's perspective, see *In 3 Sent.*, d. 27, q. 2, a. 4, sol. 2: ". . . sicut philosophia est specialis scientia, quamvis consideret ens secundum quod est omnibus commune, quia specialem rationem entis considerat secundum quod non dependet a materia et motu" (*Scriptum super Sententiis*, v. 3 [Paris: Lethielleux, 1933], pp. 886–87). *In 4 Met.*, l. 1, n. 530: "Dicit autem 'secundum quod est ens', quia scientiae aliae, quae sunt de entibus particularibus, considerant quidem de ente, cum omnia subiecta scientiarum sint

links *separatio* with metaphysics and contrasts it with the abstractions characteristic of the other theoretical sciences. This is why his distinction between abstraction in the strict sense and *separatio* in q. 5, a. 3 is so important when it comes to grounding metaphysics or to one's discovery of a metaphysical notion of being. It is by appealing to this negative judgment that one frees his notion of being from the restrictions involved in a merely primitive notion of being. As to Thomas's assertion of this distinction between abstraction in the strict sense and *separatio*, it is interesting to note that he himself settled on it only after some false starts. Examination of the transcription of his autograph of this discussion shows that in an earlier version he used the language: "Patet quod triplex est abstractio . . ." ³² In the final version he clearly distinguishes between *separatio* and abstraction and reserves the name *separatio* for the intellect's second operation. It is this that he regards as proper to metaphysics.

In order to highlight the importance of *separatio* for Aquinas, suppose, for the sake of illustration, that one were to reject this distinction and reduce the formation of the notion of being to a more refined kind of abstraction. Thus one might first abstract from the individuating differences between material and changing things, thereby ending with a general or universal concept that still included reference to sensible matter, e.g., man, horse, animal. One would then be on the level of physics or philosophy of nature. One might then abstract from common sensible matter as well, retaining only common intelligible matter or being insofar as it is quantified. One would now have reached the subject of mathematics. Finally, one might then abstract from common intelligible matter as well, thereby arriving at the notion of being as being.

The difficulty with such a procedure is that being then becomes another abstracted notion. As such it can hardly serve as subject of a

entia, non tamen considerant ens secundum quod ens, sed secundum quod est huiusmodi ens, scilicet vel numerus, vel linea, vel ignis, aut aliquid huiusmodi." *In 6 Met.*, l. 1, n. 1147: "De quolibet enim ente in quantum est ens, proprium est metaphysici considerare." It pertains to metaphysics to treat of being in general therefore, or without restriction precisely insofar as it is being rather than insofar as it is being of a given kind.

³² For Decker's transcription of the same see pp. 233. 20–24: "Patet ergo quod triplex est abstractio, qua intellectus abstrahit. Prima quidem secundum operationem secundam intellectus, qua componit et dividit. Et sic intellectum abstrahere nihil est aliud hoc non esse in hoc." On the different redactions see Geiger, "Abstraction et séparation," pp. 15–20.

science that is so universal and so transcendental that it not only applies to that which is insofar as it is, but even to the individual differences between things. If one abstracts from individual differences, from sensible matter, and from quantity in arriving at one's notion of being, how can one apply such an abstracted notion to these same individual differences, to sensible matter, and to quantity? Perhaps by adding something to the notion of being that does not fall under the same. But that could only be non-being. Such an abstract notion of being might be univocal, it would seem, but not truly analogical and not sufficiently transcendental to serve as subject of a science of being as being.³³ Hence Thomas's earlier suggestion that the mind's second operation is ordered to a thing's *esse*. Reliance solely on the mind's first operation has been rejected by him as insufficient to grasp being as real, or as existing. Were one to move by simple abstraction from the primitive notion of being attained through judgment to a metaphysical notion of being, one would, presumably, abstract from existence as well as from individual differences, from common sensible matter, and from quantity. But all of these should be included under the resulting metaphysical notion of being.³⁴ Hence Thomas's second appeal to

³³ In his commentary on *Metaphysics* 1, Thomas attributes such reasoning to Parmenides: "Quicquid est praeter ens, est non ens: et quicquid est non ens, est nihil: ergo quicquid est praeter ens est nihil. Sed ens est unum. Ergo quicquid est praeter unum, est nihil. In quo patet quod considerabat ipsam rationem essendi quae videtur esse una, quia non potest intelligi quod ad rationem entis aliquid superveniat per quod diversificetur: quia illud quod supervenit enti, oportet esse extraneum ab ente. Quod autem est huiusmodi, est nihil. Unde non videtur quod possit diversificare ens. Sicut etiam videmus quod differentiae advenientes generi diversificant ipsum, quae tamen sunt praeter substantiam eius" (l. 9, n. 138). Thomas comments: "Sed in hoc decipiebantur, quia utebantur ente quasi una ratione et una natura sicut est natura alicuius generis; hoc enim est impossibile. Ens enim non est genus, sed multipliciter dicitur de diversis" (n. 139). Were one to regard being simply as the most abstract of all notions, one might well encounter a problem similar to that of Parmenides. One would hardly have safeguarded its analogical character. See the remarks by Robert, "La métaphysique, science distincte," pp. 213–15, esp. 214, n. p. 29. As Robert observes, the differences which contract being are still included within being, though in a confused way. But specific and individual differences are only potentially present in non-transcendental concepts. Robert refers the reader to the *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1.

³⁴ Geiger's comment bears quotation: "Mais dire cela, c'est dire équivalamment que l'être ne peut être abstrait à proprement parler ni de la matière ni des réalités immatérielles, puisque tout cela est de l'être. Finalement c'est donc le caractère transcendental, et avec lui le caractère analogique propre aux données transcendentales qui exige le jugement de séparation" (p. 28).

judgment, this time, to the negative judgment, *separatio*. As he himself has shown, in certain cases of abstraction one can mentally distinguish things that are not distinguished in reality. Not so in judgment, however. By appealing to a negative judgment, to *separatio*, therefore, one *asserts* that that by reason of which something is recognized as being is not to be identified with that by reason of which it is material or quantified or of a restricted kind. In short, one asserts that being, in order to be such, need not be material, or changing, or quantified, etc. Therefore one asserts the legitimacy of investigating being as being rather than as changing or as quantified.

The terminological differentiation between “abstraction” and “separation” is, perhaps, not so important. But the difference between that which is signified by the term “abstraction,” the intellect’s first operation, and that which is signified by “separation,” the intellect’s second or judging operation, is indeed crucial. If, therefore, at later points in his career Thomas does not always rigorously preserve this distinction in terminology between abstraction and *separatio* but uses abstraction more generally so as to apply to both ways of distinguishing, this does not imply any change in doctrine. For in these later texts he still distinguishes clearly between one operation (simple apprehension) and the other (judgment), and still connects the latter with metaphysics.³⁵

³⁵ Thus in *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 85, a. 1, ad 1, he writes: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod abstrahere contingit dupliciter. Uno modo, per modum compositionis et divisionis; sicut cum intelligimus aliquid non esse in alio, vel esse separatum ab eo. Alio modo, per modum simplicis et absolutae considerationis, sicut cum intelligimus unum, nihil considerando de alio. Abstrahere igitur per intellectum ea quae secundum rem non sunt abstracta, secundum primum modum abstrahendi, non est absque falsitate. Sed secundo modo abstrahere per intellectum quae non sunt abstracta secundum rem, non habet falsitatem.” After discussing the abstraction of the universal from the particular in the same context, and again in his reply to the second objection, Thomas also considers the kind of abstraction appropriate to mathematics, that of quantity from sensible qualities (common sensible matter). He concludes his reply to the second objection by observing: “Quaedam vero sunt quae possunt abstrahi etiam a materia intelligibili communi, sicut ens, unum, potentia et actus, et alia huiusmodi, quae etiam esse possunt absque omni materia, ut patet in substantiis immaterialibus. Et quia Plato non consideravit quod dictum est de duplici modo abstractionis [see our quotation above from his reply to objection 1], omnia quae diximus abstrahi per intellectum, posuit abstracta esse secundum rem.” Although he does not here name this kind of “abstraction” *separatio* there can be no doubt that he is referring to the intellect’s judging operation (*per modum compositionis et divisionis*). Hence his doctrine has not changed.

II

If the above has been an accurate interpretation of Thomas's mind with respect to *separatio*, a second historical problem remains to be examined. According to Aquinas, what does *separatio* presuppose? For one to judge that being, in order to be such, need not be material or changing, must one already know that positively immaterial being exists? Must one presuppose the existence of some entity such as the First Mover of the *Physics* or a spiritual soul? The majority of contemporary scholars who have studied Thomas's views on *separatio* have concluded that such is his view. According to many, Thomas grounds *separatio*, and therefore the very possibility of metaphysics, on the demonstration of the First Mover of the *Physics* (or according to some, on the demonstration of the existence of a spiritual soul). If immaterial being does in fact exist, it can exist. Therefore, one may conclude that in order for something to be realized as being, it need not be material. As one writer phrases it: "Is the existence of immaterial beings an absolute necessity for metaphysics? If by metaphysics we mean a science specifically different from physics, then their existence is absolutely necessary."³⁶

One of the most interesting defenses of the view that *separatio* must be grounded on prior knowledge of the existence of immaterial being is found in Geiger's article. After strongly asserting that this judgment presupposes awareness that immaterial beings actually exist, and after singling out two texts from Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Geiger briefly suggests that the concept of being itself enjoys a certain mode of being. Because its mode of being is immaterial, there is at least one immaterial being given with the concept of being initially drawn from the material world. He sug-

³⁶ See A. Moreno, "The Nature of Metaphysics," *Thomist* 30 (April 1966): 113. Although he does not emphasize the role of *separatio*, Vincent Smith is a fine illustration of those who ground the possibility of metaphysics on the demonstration of an immaterial and First Mover at the conclusion of physics. See his "Prime Mover, Physical and Metaphysical Considerations," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 28 (1954): 78-94; *General Science of Nature* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1958), p. 382: "A Science called metaphysics now becomes possible . . . we do not discover that there is such a subject (being as being) without our proof that there is an immaterial and immobile world and without proof that mobile being, heretofore taken by reason as the only reality, is not truly so. While the science of nature and metaphysics remain distinct disciplines, metaphysics presupposes the science of nature as a material condition."

gests that this is the procedure used by Thomas to demonstrate the existence of the purely immaterial activity of our intellect and, thereby, the immateriality of the power of the intellect itself and of the human soul.³⁷

Consideration of the texts he cites leads one back to the historical issue: does Thomas himself ground *separatio* and the very possibility of metaphysics on prior awareness that immaterial being exists? A first text is taken from his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, book 1, lectio 12, number 181. Here Thomas reports with approval Aristotle's criticism of the position of the ancient philosophers of nature. Thomas notes that they were mistaken in positing nothing but corporeal principles. Against them he observes that there are not only corporeal but also certain incorporeal things, as is evident from the *De anima*.³⁸ This text is interesting for our purposes, it would seem, because in denying that only physical or corporeal realities exist, Aquinas does refer in passing to the *De anima*, and presumably to what he regards as a demonstration of the incorporeal therein. But this text of itself does not show that the possibility of metaphysics in general or of *separatio* in particular must be grounded on such a presupposition. Hence we find little support in it for Geiger's contention.

Geiger's second text is also taken from Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, this time from book 4, lectio 5, number 593. There Thomas again finds Aristotle criticizing the ancient philoso-

³⁷ Geiger, "Abstraction et séparation," pp. 24–25. Note his comment on p. 24: "Pour que l'intelligence puisse le prononcer en toute vérité scientifique, faut-il donc qu'elle sache qu'il existe des êtres immatériels avant de commencer la métaphysique? Sans aucun doute. Et S. Thomas le dit explicitement dans deux textes au moins . . ." He then cites two texts from Thomas's Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, for which see below. For his argument from the immateriality of the concept of being, see the following: "Alors que l'objet des concepts portant sur les essences est limité à cette essence, et donc au contenu du concept—le concept de cheval n'est pas un cheval, mais signifie le cheval—the concept de l'être signifie l'être et est lui-même de l'être, parce que l'être est transcendant à toute catégorie. Le concept est lui-même un certain mode de l'être, et puisqu'il est immatériel, c'est un certain être immatériel qui est donné avec le concept de l'être tiré du monde matériel" (p. 25).

³⁸ "Quia in rebus non solum sunt corporea, sed etiam quaedam incorporea, ut patet ex libro de Anima. Sed ipsi non posuerunt principia nisi corporea . . ." *In duodecim libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. Cathala-Spiazzi (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1950). Our citation of this work will be from this edition.

phers of nature, this time for having concerned themselves with examining the first principles of demonstration. This is understandable in light of the ancients' view that only corporeal and mobile substance exists. Thomas observes that because of this the philosophers of nature were thought to treat of the whole of nature, and therefore of being as being as well as of the first principles that are considered together with being. This view is false, Thomas counters, because there is still another science that is superior to natural philosophy. Nature, or natural being, is only one given class (*genus*) within the totality of being. But not all being is of this type. (Here one appears to have an instance of *separatio*, the judgment that not all being is physical or material.) In support of this judgment, Thomas then appeals to the existence of an immobile being as established in Book 8 of the *Physics*. He comments that this immobile being is superior to and nobler than mobile being, which the physicist considers. And then, in a passage which expands considerably upon the text of Aristotle, he writes: "And because the consideration of *ens commune* pertains to that science to which it also belongs to consider the first being, therefore the consideration of *ens commune* also belongs to a science different from natural philosophy." Hence it will pertain to that science to study such principles.³⁹

Geiger concludes from this text and the previous one that the negative judgment which grounds the immateriality of the object of

³⁹ See n. 593 of Thomas's commentary. Note in particular: "Hoc autem falsum est; quia adhuc est quaedam scientia superior naturali: ipsa enim natura, idest res naturalis habens in se principium motus, in se ipsa est unum aliquod genus entis universalis. Non enim omne ens est huiusmodi; cum probatum sit in octavo *Physicorum* esse aliquod ens immobile. Hoc autem ens immobile superius est et nobilius ente mobili, de quo considerat naturalis. Et quia ad illam scientiam pertinet consideratio entis communis, ad quam pertinet consideratio entis primi, ideo ad aliam scientiam quam ad naturalem pertinet consideratio entis communis." Although it cannot be assumed that the Latin text of the *Metaphysics* printed with Thomas's commentary is always identical with the version on which he commented, we will cite it and then the corresponding Greek text in order to facilitate comparison between Aristotle's statement and Thomas's expanded affirmation of identification of the science of the first being and the science of *ens commune*: "Sed quoniam est adhuc physico aliquis superior, unum enim aliquod genus est natura entis, ipsius universalis et circa substantiam primam theorizantis, et de his erit perscrutatio" (n. 323, p. 163); ἐπεὶ δ' ἔστιν ἔτι τοῦ φυσικοῦ τις ἀνωτέρω (ἐν γάρ τι γένος τοῦ ὄντος ἢ Φύσις), τοῦ καθόλου καὶ τοῦ περὶ τὴν πρώτην οὐσίαν θεωρητικοῦ καὶ ἡ περὶ τούτων ἂν εἴη σκέψις (1005a33-1005b1).

metaphysics draws its objective value from the demonstration of immaterial beings effected in the philosophy of nature: the First Mover of *Physics* 8, and the human soul with its agent and possible intellect as established in the *De anima*. For Geiger this is only to be expected, since Thomas also affirms on other occasions that metaphysics should be taught after physics.⁴⁰

As regards the text from Thomas's commentary on *Metaphysics* 4, one might contend that he here justifies *separatio* by appealing to the fact that immobile being exists, something that he takes *Physics* 8 to have established. Moreover, he justifies the existence of the science of *ens commune* by asserting that it belongs to one and the same science to study the first being and to study *ens commune*. Hence he seems to justify *separatio*, the science of the first being, and the science of *ens commune*, by appealing to the existence of the immobile and first mover demonstrated in the *Physics*.

However, this passage of itself does not appear to be conclusive proof that in Thomas's eyes one must ground metaphysics and *separatio* on the conclusions of the *Physics*. The situation is dialectical. Thomas is commenting on Aristotle's criticism of the earlier natural philosophers and their restriction of reality to the material. Against this it would only be natural for him to cite a counterfact, the existence of immaterial being as established at the end of the *Physics*. Given this, it is not surprising to find him also arguing that the science that studies this first and immaterial being, because it also studies being in general, is distinct from and higher than physics. Hence, granted that in this particular case he reasons from the fact that immaterial being exists to the distinctive character of the science of that first entity and the science of *ens commune*, it need not follow that he could only proceed in this manner. It was only natural for him to do so here, because of the context, that is, the refutation of the early naturalists, and because of his ultimate purpose in the immediate context, to show that the study of first principles does not belong to them but to the science that studies being in general. Finally, Thomas is here interpreting the text of Aristotle. If in more independent texts one should find him suggesting a different procedure, then greater weight should be given to those texts

⁴⁰ Geiger, "Abstraction et séparation," p. 25. See below for consideration of such passages wherein Thomas recommends studying physics after metaphysics.

when it comes to a determination of Thomas's personal thought on the matter in question. This final suggestion will be developed below.

Perhaps the most forceful text pointing toward the dependence of metaphysics and presumably, therefore, of *separatio* upon the conclusions of natural philosophy is to be found in Thomas's commentary on the final lines of chapter 1 of book 6 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (and in his commentary on the parallel passage in book 11).⁴¹ Here Thomas follows Aristotle's text very closely and raises the question to which Aristotle himself explicitly adverts. One might well wonder whether first philosophy is universal in that it studies being in general, or whether its consideration is rather directed to a particular genus and a particular nature (separate and immobile reality).⁴² The question, of course, arises naturally from earlier developments in book 4, chapters 1 and 2, and book 6, chapter 1 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aristotle's own resolution of this same difficulty has caused considerable perplexity for his commentators, as is well known.⁴³

In commenting on the solution offered by Aristotle in book 6, Thomas repeats his text with slightest modification. If there is no other substance apart from those that exist according to nature and of which physics treats, then physics will be the first science. But if there is some immobile substance, this will be prior to natural sub-

⁴¹ See nn. 1169–70, commenting on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 6, c. 1 (1026a23–32); and nn. 2266–67, commenting on *Metaphysics* 11, c. 7 (1064b6–14).

⁴² See n. 1169: "Tertio movetur quaedam quaestio circa praedeterminata: et primo movet eam, dicens, quod aliquis potest dubitare, utrum prima philosophia sit universalis quasi considerans ens universaliter, aut eius consideratio sit circa aliquod genus determinatum et naturam unam." For the parallel from his commentary on bk. 11, see n. 2266: ". . . et dicit: Dubitabile est, utrum istam scientiam, quae est circa entia separabilia, oporteat poni universalem scientiam entis, in quantum est ens, aut non. . . ."

⁴³ See, for instance, the solutions proposed by J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1957); Ph. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*, 2d ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), chap. 7; A. Mansion, "L'objet de la science philosophique suprême d'après Aristote, *Métaphysique E I*," *Mélanges de philosophie grecque offerts à Mgr. A. Diès* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1956), pp. 151–68; "Philosophie première, philosophie seconde, et métaphysique chez Aristote," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 56 (May 1958): 165–221; P. Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote. Essai sur la problématique Aristotélicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962); E. König, "Aristoteles' erste Philosophie als universale Wissenschaft von den APXAI," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 52 (1970): 225–46.

stance. Therefore, the philosophy that considers this kind of substance will be first philosophy. And because it is first it will therefore be universal. It will belong to it to study being as being, both what it is, and the attributes which pertain to being as being.⁴⁴ And then, in a significant addition to Aristotle's text, Thomas concludes: for the science of the first being and the science of being in general are one and the same, as has been maintained in the beginning of book 4.⁴⁵ Thomas's commentary on the passage in book 11 parallels the above very closely. But there he offers a justification for the concluding statement which he had added to his commentary on book 6. To prove that the science that studies the first being(s) is the same as the universal science, he observes that the first beings are the principles of the others.⁴⁶

One might, therefore, well argue from Thomas's commentary on the passage from *Metaphysics* 6 (and the parallel text from *Metaphysics* 11) that metaphysics (and *separatio* as required to discover being as being) presupposes prior awareness that immaterial

⁴⁴ n. 1170. Thomas's final sentence reads: "Et quia est prima, ideo erit universalis, et erit eius speculari de ente in quantum est ens, et de eo quod quid est, et de his quae sunt entis in quantum est ens; eadem enim est scientia primi entis et entis communis, ut in principio quarti habitum est." Compare with the Latin version printed in the Marietti text: "Et quia prima et de ente in quantum est ens, eius utique est speculari, et quod quid est, et quae insunt in quantum ens" (p. 294, n. 542). In both this text and in Thomas's paraphrase of the same, the expression "quia prima" ("because it is first") with which the preceding sentence concludes in the Greek text has rather been joined to the following sentence. For the Greek see 1026a29–32: εἰ δ' ἔστι τις οὐσία ἀκίνητος, αὕτη πρότερα καὶ φιλοσοφία πρώτη, καὶ καθόλου οὕτως ὅτι πρώτη· καὶ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἧ ὄν, ταύτης ἂν εἴη θεωρηῆσαι, καὶ τί ἐστι καὶ τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ἧ ὄν. Also see Thomas, *In 3 Met.*: "Sicut si non essent aliae substantiae priores substantiis mobilibus corporalibus, scientia naturalis esset philosophia prima, ut dicitur infra in sexto" (n. 398). As Thomas himself indicates in this paragraph, this statement is to be read in the light of Aristotle's procedure in *Metaphysics* 4 and 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid. For the text see n. 44 above.

⁴⁶ n. 2267. "Sed de naturali manifestum est; quia si naturales substantiae, quae sunt substantiae sensibiles et mobiles, sunt primae inter entia, oportet quod naturalis scientia sit prima inter scientias; quia secundum ordinem subiectorum, est ordo scientiarum, ut iam dictum est.—Si autem est alia natura et substantia praeter substantias naturales, quae sit separabilis et immobilis, necesse est alteram scientiam ipsius esse, quae sit prior naturali. Et ex eo quod est prima, oportet quod sit universalis. Eadem enim est scientia quae est de primis entibus, et quae est universalis. *Nam prima entia sunt principia aliorum*" (italics mine).

and immobile being exists. Negatively expressed, Thomas has written that if there is no substance beyond the physical, then physics will be the first science. Positively phrased, he states that if there is some immobile substance, then the philosophy that studies this kind of substance will be first, and because it is first, it will also be universal and the science of being as being. Moreover, if one wonders how Aristotle himself justifies the transition from first philosophy to the universal science in this passage (see *Metaphysics* 6, 1026a30 ff.), Thomas has asserted the identity of the two in commenting on *Metaphysics* 6. In commenting on *Metaphysics* 11, he has supplied an added reason: the first being(s) are the principles of the others. The implication seems to be: in studying the first principle, one studies all else. In sum, therefore, if all being is physical, if there is no immaterial and immobile being in the positive sense, it seems that one could not reason that being, in order to be, need not be material. In short, one would not be justified in distinguishing being as such from being as material and changeable by means of *separatio*. Therefore, one would be unable to arrive at a science of being as being rather than a science of being as changing.⁴⁷ It should also be noted that prior knowledge of immaterial and immobile beings appears to be required. In other words, prior knowledge of the existence of a spiritual human soul is not implied by these texts from Thomas's commentary. Hence they offer little support for the view that one might ground *separatio* on this conclusion rather than on the existence of an immaterial *and* immobile being, viz., the First and Unmoved Mover.

In attempting to evaluate the importance of this text and its parallel, two points should be recalled. (1) Thomas is here writing as a commentator on Aristotle and is following his text with greatest care. In fact, he presents this as Aristotle's answer to Aristotle's question. Can one automatically assume that this reflects Thomas's own opinion, unless further evidence can also be offered from other texts where Thomas is clearly expressing his personal views? One's hesitation in replying in the affirmative will, of course, increase if

⁴⁷ For such an interpretation of these passages see Moreno, "The Nature of *Metaphysics*," pp. 113–15; T. O'Brien, *Metaphysics and the Existence of God* (Washington, D.C.: Thomist Press, 1960), p. 160 (citing *In 6 Met.*, n. 1170); J. Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), p. 243, n. 1; p. 303, n. 1; J. Weisheipl, "The Relationship of Medieval Natural Philosophy to Modern Science: The Contribution of Thomas Aquinas to its Understanding," *Manuscripta* 20 (November 1976): 194–96.

one finds Thomas suggesting a different procedure in such texts.⁴⁸ (2) The concluding sentence, as has already been noted above, has been added by Aquinas and appeals to the identity of the science that studies the first being and the science that studies being in general, as established in the beginning of book 4. For the sake of convenience, these two points will now be considered in reverse order.

As regards the second point, Thomas makes an interesting remark in commenting on the opening chapter of *Metaphysics* 4. He observes that the Philosopher (Aristotle) is there attempting to show that the science under examination has *ens* for its subject. He notes that every principle is a per se principle and cause with respect to some nature. But in this science we seek after the first principles and ultimate causes of things, he continues, repeating Aristotle's text, and refers to book 1 of the *Metaphysics* for support for the same.⁴⁹ Therefore, these first principles and ultimate causes must also be per se principles and causes of some nature. But that "nature" can only be *ens*. Following Aristotle, he writes that those philosophers who investigated the elements of things insofar as they are beings were seeking principles of this type (*prima et altissima*). Therefore, continues Thomas, in this science we must investigate the principles of being as being. And in an addition to Aristotle's text he concludes: "Therefore being [*ens*] is the subject of this science, because every science seeks after the proper causes of its subject."⁵⁰

In sum, therefore, Thomas here is surely stating his personal view, a view that he attributes to Aristotle as well, that is, that *ens* or being is the subject of this science. One can be certain that this is

⁴⁸ On the difficult point of determining whether Thomas in this commentary is simply exposing Aristotle's thought as he understands it, or whether he is using the commentary as an *occasio* to express his personal metaphysical views, or whether he proceeds in one way at times and in the other at other times, see J. Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics: A Historico-doctrinal Study of the Commentary on the Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972). For our review of the same see *Speculum* 52 (January 1977): 133–35. For an examination of Thomas's role as commentator on Aristotle in general, but with special emphasis on the commentary on the *Metaphysics*, see J. Owens, "Aquinas as Aristotelian Commentator," *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 1: pp. 213–38.

⁴⁹ See chaps. 1 and 2 and Thomas's commentary on the same.

⁵⁰ *In 4 Met.*, n. 533. See in particular: ". . . ergo ens est subiectum huius scientiae, quia quaelibet scientia est quaerens causas proprias sui subiecti."

his personal opinion because of statements in other texts as well.⁵¹ But if it is his view that being is the subject of metaphysics, and secondly that it is the business of a science to investigate the principles and causes of its subject, and finally that God (the First Unmoved Mover) is such a principle, then it would seem strange for him to suggest that one must first prove the existence of the First Unmoved Mover (or God) in physics before discovering the subject of this science (metaphysics).⁵² Yet such seems to be implied by his commentary on *Metaphysics* 6, chapter 1 and in the parallel passage in *Metaphysics* 11, as we have seen above. And such seems to be implied by the more traditional insistence that, according to Aquinas, one must move from a demonstration of the First Mover in physics to the discovery of being as being or to *separatio* as required for metaphysics. It would rather seem that Thomas should have one begin by discovering being as such or being in general (as achieved by a judgment of existence and by separation according to our interpretation), and then, as part of the business of metaphysics, reason to the existence of the cause or principle of *ens commune*, that is to say, God. If it is difficult to reconcile this procedure with the statements

⁵¹ See, for instance, the references given in our n. 11 above.

⁵² Note the concluding sentence of Thomas's commentary on the *Physics*: "Et sic terminat Philosophus considerationem communem de rebus naturalibus, in primo principio totius naturae, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula. Amen." ed. Maggiolo (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1954), n. 1172. For a general discussion of the contested point as to whether in Thomas's view the First Mover of *Physics* 8 is, in fact, God, see A. Pegis, "St. Thomas and the Coherence of the Aristotelian Theology," *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973): 67-117. For reference to some who would deny this see p. 68 and n. 3. See especially J. Paulus, "La théorie du Premier Moteur chez Aristote," *Revue de philosophie* n.s. 4 (May-June 1933): 259-94 and 394-424; J. Owens, "Aquinas and the Proof from the 'Physics'," *Mediaeval Studies* 28 (1966): 119-50. Pegis himself strongly defends this identity. See, for instance, pp. 97 ff. Whether or not Thomas has in fact reasoned to the existence of God in his commentary on the *Physics*, and if so whether he has or has not introduced some surreptitious metaphysical reasoning into the argumentation is too far-reaching an issue for us to attempt to resolve in this study. We will content ourselves with the observation that in his final sentence therein he does assert that Aristotle's first principle of the whole of nature, in which the *Physics* terminates, is God. And we would stress the point to which we have already partially adverted, that the difficult passages from Thomas's commentary on *Metaphysics* 6 and 11 seem to require prior knowledge of immaterial, separate, and immobile being in order to justify metaphysics. Neither prior knowledge of the human soul nor of a sphere soul that moves itself without being absolutely unmoved and separate would appear to suffice.

found in his commentary on *Metaphysics* 6 and 11, it may be that in those texts he does not present his personal view, but his understanding of Aristotle's text. And it may be that on this particular point, the two do not coincide. This, of course, brings us back to the first point singled out above.

For further clarification of this one is well advised to turn to the Prooemium to Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Here, in any event, he is surely writing in his own name. Again he lists the same three titles for this science that we have seen in question 5, article 1 of his commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, that is: theology, metaphysics and first philosophy.⁵³

Here he has already reasoned that one of the sciences should direct or rule the others, and that it will therefore deserve to be entitled "wisdom." In an effort to determine which science this is, he writes that it will be the one that is most intellectual. But the most intellectual science is that which treats of that which is most intelligible.

Things may be described as most intelligible from different perspectives, three of which Thomas here singles out. First of all, something may be regarded as most intelligible from the viewpoint of the order of understanding (*ex ordine intelligendi*). Those things from which the intellect derives certitude are more intelligible than others. Since such are the causes, a knowledge of causes appears to be most intellectual. Hence, from this standpoint the science that considers the first causes appears to be best qualified to direct the others.

Secondly, things may be regarded as most intelligible from the standpoint of the relationship between sense and intellect. While sense knowledge has to do with particulars, intellectual knowledge is ordered to the universal. Therefore, that science is most intellectual which treats of the most universal principles, that is, of being and

⁵³ See the final paragraph of the prooemium: "Dicitur enim scientia divina sive *theologia*, in quantum praedictas substantias considerat. *Metaphysica*, in quantum considerat ens et ea quae consequuntur ipsum . . . Dicitur autem *prima philosophia*, in quantum primas rerum causas considerat." His reason for entitling this science "first philosophy" (because it considers the first causes of things) differs from that offered in his commentary on the *De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 1: "Dicitur etiam philosophia prima, in quantum aliae omnes scientiae ab ea sua principia accipientes eam consequuntur" (p. 166). For our effort to resolve this problem in Thomistic interpretation see the study cited in n. 11 above.

that which follows upon it such as the one and the many, potency and act. From this standpoint, therefore, the science of the universal, that is, the science of being, is the most intellectual and best qualified to rule or direct the others.

Thirdly, something may be viewed as most intelligible from the standpoint of the conditions required for intellection to occur. Since a thing is capable of intellection to the degree that it is free from matter, and since the intellect and its object must be proportioned to one another, things that are most separate from matter are most intelligible. But those things are most separate or removed from matter which abstract from sensible matter altogether, not only in the order of thought but also in the order of being. As examples Thomas cites God and the intelligences. Therefore, from this perspective, the science that treats of God and the intelligences is the most intellectual and hence chief or mistress of the others.⁵⁴

Thomas then raises the obvious question. One might wonder whether or not these different kinds of intelligibles are to be investigated by one and the same science. In his effort to show that this is the case he first observes that the above mentioned separate substances (see class three) are universal and primary causes of being (see class one). Moreover, he continues, it pertains to one and the same science to investigate the causes proper to a given genus and to investigate that genus itself. Thus the natural philosopher considers the principles of natural body. Therefore, it belongs to one and the same science to investigate both the separate substances and *ens commune* (see class two). This is so because *ens commune* is the "genus" of which the separate substances are common and universal causes.⁵⁵

In other terms, Thomas has distinguished three classes of intelligible objects and has endeavored to show that while all three of these are studied by the science in question, only one of them, *ens commune*,

⁵⁴ For all of this see the prooemium, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Haec autem triplex consideratio, non diversis, sed uni scientiae attribui debet. Nam praedictae substantiae separatae sunt universales et primae causae essendi. Eiusdem autem scientiae est considerare causas proprias alicuius generis et genus ipsum: sicut naturalis considerat principia corporis naturalis. Unde oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et ens commune, quod est genus, cuius sunt praedictae substantiae communes et universales causae" (prooemium, pp. 1-2).

is its subject. As Thomas also indicates, the subject of a science is that whose causes and properties one investigates rather than those causes themselves. Knowledge of the causes is the end or goal toward which the science's investigation is directed.⁵⁶

Here, then, one has reinforcement for the view being proposed in this paper, the suggestion that one begins the science of metaphysics with its subject, the notion of being in general already achieved by *separatio*, and then, as part of the business of metaphysics, one seeks for the cause or causes of that same genus, that is to say, God and separate substances. Rather than presuppose the existence of immaterial being in the positive sense (God and separate entities), such knowledge is here held out as the end or goal towards which the metaphysician's investigation strives.

Finally, Thomas makes it clear here that not only immaterial being in the positive sense is at issue. Not only are those things said to be separate from matter *secundum esse et rationem* which are never found in matter, such as God and intellectual substances, but also those which can be without matter, such as *ens commune*.⁵⁷ As he had noted in question 5, article 4 of his commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius:

. . . something can exist separate from matter and motion in two distinct ways: First, because by its nature the thing that is called separate in no way can exist in matter and motion, as God and the angels are said to be separate from matter and motion. Second, because by

⁵⁶ "Ex quo apparet, quod quamvis ista scientia praedicta tria consideret, non tamen considerat quodlibet eorum ut subiectum, sed ipsum solum ens commune. Hoc enim est subiectum in scientia, cuius causas et passiones quaerimus, non autem ipsae causae alicuius generis quaesiti. Nam cognitio causarum alicuius generis, est finis ad quem consideratio scientiae pertingit" (prooemium, p. 2). For the same view with respect to the relationship between a science, its subject-genus, and its principles, see the commentary on the *De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4, c. (192–95). There, too, Thomas notes that "divine things" are studied by the philosophers only insofar as they are the principles of all things. Hence they are treated in that discipline which studies that which is common to all beings and which has as its subject *ens in quantum est ens* (p. 194. 23–26).

⁵⁷ "Quamvis autem subiectum huius scientiae sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quae sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem. Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quae nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiae, sed etiam illa quae possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent" (prooemium, p. 2).

its nature it does not exist in matter and motion, but it can exist without them, though we sometimes find it with them.⁵⁸

It is clear that it is this second type of immateriality, negative or neutral immateriality, that applies to *ens commune*, the subject of metaphysics. As Thomas also comments in that same article from his commentary on the *De Trinitate*:

. . . We say that being and substance are separate from matter and motion, not because it is of their nature to be without them . . . but because it is not of their nature to be in matter and motion, although sometimes they are in matter and motion . . .⁵⁹

As we have indicated above, it is this kind of immateriality that is achieved by *separatio*. And in light of Thomas's discussion both in the body of question 5, article 4 of this same commentary and in the prooemium to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, it does not seem that discovery of the same presupposes prior awareness that immaterial being in the positive or stronger sense actually exists.

In the prooemium Thomas had appealed to the position of the natural philosopher in order to show that one and the same science may investigate the causes of its subject genus and that genus itself.⁶⁰ As regards Thomas's own attitude with respect to the science that has *ens commune* as its subject, one might develop the parallel he has suggested there as follows. As natural philosophy is to its subject and the causes of its subject, so is metaphysics to its subject and the causes of its subject. But natural philosophy does not presuppose

⁵⁸ Maurer trans., p. 45. For the Latin see the Decker ed., p. 195. 12–18: “. . . secundum quod dupliciter potest esse aliquid a materia et motu separatum secundum esse. Uno modo sic, quod de ratione ipsius rei, quae separata dicitur, sit quod nullo modo in materia et motu esse possit, sicut Deus et angeli dicuntur a materia et motu separati. Alio modo sic, quod non sit de ratione eius quod sit in materia et motu, sed possit esse sine materia et motu, quamvis quandoque inveniatur in materia et motu.” As Thomas goes on to observe in the immediate context, it is in this second way that being (*ens*), substance, and potency and act are separate.

⁵⁹ q. 5, a. 4 and 5 (Maurer trans., pp. 48–49). For the Latin see the Decker ed., p. 199. 4–9: “Ad quintum dicendum quod ens et substantia dicuntur separata a materia et motu non per hoc quod de ratione ipsorum sit esse sine materia et motu, sicut de ratione asini est sine ratione esse, sed per hoc quod de ratione eorum non est esse in materia et motu, quamvis quandoque sint in materia et motu, sicut animal abstrahit a ratione, quamvis aliquid sit rationale.” This text and the one cited in the previous note bring out quite well what we have styled the negative or neutral immateriality of the notion of being.

⁶⁰ See the text cited in n. 55 above.

the existence of the cause of its subject, but reasons to the same. Therefore, metaphysics does not presuppose the existence of the cause(s) of its subject (God and/or separate entity), but reasons to the same. If, as at times appears to be the case, Thomas has identified the First Mover of *Physics* 8 with God, then he could hardly make prior knowledge of the existence of this First Mover a necessary presupposition for beginning metaphysics.⁶¹ To do so would be to have the metaphysician presuppose prior knowledge of the existence of the cause of the subject of his science. But knowledge of this cause has been proposed as the end or goal of the metaphysician's investigation.

On the other hand, one might meet the above contention by suggesting that Thomas has distinguished between the First Mover of the *Physics* (an immanent and self-moving principle of change) and the First Principle of the *Metaphysics* (an absolutely immobile and separate cause of being, or God).⁶² Then one might argue that according to Thomas prior knowledge of this First Mover as established in physics is required if one is to discover being as being. Still, this suggestion will not do. If one insists that according to Thomas one must reason from the fact that immaterial, immobile, and separate

⁶¹ See n. 52 above for the concluding sentence of Thomas's commentary on the *Physics* and for the studies by Pegis as well as those by Owens and Paulus.

⁶² As noted by Owens and Pegis, *Summa contra gentiles* 1. 13 is particularly difficult to interpret on this point. One paragraph might well be taken to imply that Thomas here distinguishes between the primary immobile mover as a sphere soul established by Aristotle in *Physics* 8 and the God who is proven in *Metaphysics* 12: "Sed quia Deus non est pars alicuius moventis seipsum, ulterius Aristoteles, in sua *Metaphysica*, investigat ex hoc motore qui est pars moventis seipsum, alium motorem separatum omnino, qui est Deus" (see in his discussion of the "secunda via," the par. "sed quia"). For Owens's discussion of this see his "Aquinas and the Proof from the 'Physics'," pp. 132–37. Note in particular his concluding comment with respect to the treatment in *SCG* 1. 13: "Here in the same chapter the interpretations of the argument as leading in the *Physics* to a sphere soul and to God occur side by side, without any feeling of embarrassment being shown by the writer" (p. 137). For a different interpretation of the same see Pegis, "St. Thomas and the Coherence of the Aristotelian Theology," pp. 78–86; 108–12. As already noted above (see n. 52), Pegis maintains that for Thomas, in proving the existence of the prime mover in the *Physics* Aristotle was proving the existence of God. Owens, on the other hand, finds no definite indication that Thomas himself thought that a demonstration on the level of natural philosophy can prove God's existence (p. 149). For his view that the "first way" of *ST* 1, q. 2, a. 3 is metaphysical rather than pertaining to the philosophy of nature see his "The Conclusion of the Prima Via," *Modern Schoolman* 30 (January 1953): 109–21.

being exists (as implied by the commentary on *Metaphysics* 6 and 11) in order to justify *separatio*, appeal to an immanent self-moving mover will not suffice.⁶³ If one must reason from the fact that immaterial, immobile, and separate being exists to the possibility of considering being as being rather than as material, changeable, and immanent, appeal to such an immanent mover will be of little avail.

Before concluding this historical investigation, it is incumbent upon us to consider one final point. There can be little doubt that Thomas frequently enough recommends that one move from a study of physics to metaphysics when he discusses the order of learning. This fact might be raised against the interpretation just proposed and in support of the claim that for Aquinas both *separatio* and the very possibility of metaphysics presuppose the conclusions of *Physics*. Although limitations of space will not permit detailed consideration of each of these passages, some general remarks are in order. In the interests of simplification, one might divide these texts into two general categories: 1) those based on the incapacity of the learner, when too young, to learn metaphysics; 2) those treating of the relationship between metaphysics and other intellectual disciplines, especially physics (natural philosophy).⁶⁴

One of the finest illustrations of the first is to be found in Thomas's commentary on book 6 of Aristotle's *Ethics*. Aristotle's query as to why a boy may become a mathematician but not a wise man or a philosopher of nature serves as the occasion for Thomas's reflections.⁶⁵ Thomas takes the term "wise man" to refer to a metaphysician. He begins by expanding on Aristotle's reply. Mathematics are grasped by abstraction from sensible things of which even a boy (*puer*) has awareness. But natural principles are not simply abstracted from sensible things but are acquired by experience, for which considerable time is required. As regards wisdom, continues Thomas, Aristotle

⁶³ Thomas's texts from his commentary on *Metaphysics* 6 and 11 do imply that if there were no immaterial, immutable, and separate entity, physics would be first philosophy (see nn. 1163, 1164, 1169, 1170, 2266, 2267). Hence, if this does indeed reflect Thomas's personal view rather than his interpretation of Aristotle, knowledge of an immanent and self-moving principle of change, that is, a sphere soul, will be no more adequate than knowledge of the human soul.

⁶⁴ On this see G. Klubertanz, "St. Thomas on Learning Metaphysics," *Gregorianum* 35 (1954): 3–17. Also see his "The Teaching of Thomistic Metaphysics," *Gregorianum* 35 (1954): 187–205.

⁶⁵ For Aristotle see *Ethics* 6. 8. 1142a16 ff.

observes that young men (*iuvenes*)⁶⁶ do not attain metaphysical truths with their minds even though they may verbally utter them. In support of this Thomas also comments that mathematical definitions (*rationes*) pertain to things that can be imagined, whereas those of wisdom (metaphysics) are purely intelligible. If young men (*iuvenes*) can grasp that which is imaginable, they find it difficult to attain that which exceeds this level.⁶⁷

With this background in mind, then, Thomas proposes the following order for learning. Boys (*pueri*) should first be instructed in logic, and then in mathematics. They should then study natural things (natural philosophy presumably). For while natural things do not transcend the level of sense and imagination, knowledge of them does require experience. Then only should they be introduced to moral science, and last of all, to wisdom and the study of divine things which transcend the imagination and require a powerful intellect.⁶⁸ One finds a similar progression of disciplines reported by Thomas in his commentary on the *Liber de causis*.⁶⁹ But in both of

⁶⁶ On the meanings to be assigned to the terms *puer* and *iuvenis* in Thomas's usage see Klubertanz, "St. Thomas on Learning Metaphysics," pp. 5–8.

⁶⁷ *In 6 Ethic.*, l. 7 (Spiazzi ed., [Turin: Marietti, 1964] nn. 1209–10). Note in particular: "Iuvenes autem de facili capere possunt ea quae sub imaginatione cadunt. Sed ad illa quae excedunt sensum et imaginationem non attingunt mente, quia nondum habent intellectum exercitatum ad tales considerationes, tum propter parvitatem temporis, tum propter pluri-mas mutationes naturae."

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 1211. "Erit ergo congruus ordo addiscendi ut primo quidem pueri logicalibus instruantur, quia logica docet modum totius philosophiae. Secundo autem instruendi sunt in mathematicis quae nec experientia indigent, nec imaginationem transcendunt. Tertio autem in naturalibus; quae etsi non excedunt sensum et imaginationem, requirunt tamen experientiam. Quarto in moralibus quae requirunt experientiam et animum a passionibus liberum, ut in primo habitum est. Quinto autem in sapientialibus et divinis quae transcendunt imaginationem et requirunt validum intellectum." That this text does reflect Thomas's own view and not merely his interpretation of Aristotle's thought is indicated both by the fact that it is an addition to the text being commented on and by comparison with Thomas's correlation of sense, imagination, and intellect with physics, mathematics, and divine science in terms of their respective levels of termination in his commentary on the *De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 2, pass.

⁶⁹ Here Thomas presents the same learning order as that which the philosophers themselves had followed: "Et inde est quod philosophorum intentio ad hoc principaliter erat ut, per omnia quae in rebus considerabant, ad cognitionem primarum causarum pervenirent. Unde scientiam de primis causis ultimo ordinabant, cuius considerationi ultimum tempus suae vitae

these texts the concern appears to be pedagogical, that is to say, with the gradually developing capacities of the learning subject. There is no indication that one should study metaphysics after natural philosophy because the former depends upon the latter for knowledge of its starting point. Hence texts such as these surely do not point to an essential or intrinsic dependency of metaphysics upon the conclusions of physics, and especially not with respect to discovery of the subject of metaphysics, being as being as attained by *separatio*.

Other texts treat of the relationship that obtains between metaphysics, on the one hand, and other disciplines, especially natural philosophy, on the other. One of the fullest is to be found in question 5, article 1 of Thomas's commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, hence in that same work wherein he was to develop and present his views on *separatio*. There, in replying to the ninth objection, he writes:

Although divine science is by nature the first of all the sciences, with respect to us the other sciences come before it. For, as Avicenna says, the position of this science is that it be learned after the natural sciences, which explain many things used by metaphysics, such as generation, corruption, motion, and the like. It should also be learned after mathematics, because to know the separate substances metaphysics has to know the number and dispositions of the heavenly spheres and this is impossible without astronomy, which presupposes the whole of mathematics. Other sciences, such as music, ethics, and the like, contribute to its fullness of perfection.⁷⁰

deputarent: primo quidem incipientes a logica quae modum scientiarum tradit, secundo procedentes ad mathematicam cuius etiam pueri possunt esse capaces, tertio ad naturalem philosophiam quae propter experientiam tempore indiget, quarto autem ad moralem philosophiam cuius iuvenis esse conueniens auditor non potest, ultimo autem scientiae divinae insistebant quae considerat primas entium causas." *Sancti Thomae de Aquino super Librum de causis expositio*, ed. H. D. Saffrey (Fribourg: Société Philosophique-Louvain, E. Nauwelaerts, 1954), p. 2. For an interesting discussion as to how Thomas would apply the order recommended by the text cited in n. 68 above to medieval pre-theological students, see Klubertanz, "St. Thomas on Learning Metaphysics," pp. 14–16. Klubertanz (p. 5, n. 3) lists some other texts on the difficulty of learning metaphysics or which assign it to last place. Of these see *In Isaiam*, c. 3; *SCG* 1. 4; *In 1 Met.*, l. 2, n. 46.

⁷⁰ Maurer trans., pp. 16–17. For the Latin see Decker ed., 172. 3–11: ". . . quamvis scientia divina sit prima omnium scientiarum naturaliter, tamen quoad nos aliae scientiae sunt priores. Ut enim dicit Avicenna in principio suae Metaphysicae, ordo huius scientiae est, ut addiscatur post scientias naturales, in quibus sunt multa determinata, quibus ista scientia utitur, ut generatio, corruptio, motus et alia huiusmodi. Similiter etiam post mathematicas. Indiget enim haec scientia ad cognitionem substantiarum separatarum cognoscere numerum et ordines orbium caelestium, quod non est possibile sine astrologia, ad quam tota mathematica prae-exigitur. Aliae vero scientiae sunt ad bene esse ipsius, ut musica et morales vel aliae huiusmodi."

In another context we have had occasion to comment on this passage and the immediately following lines in some detail and to stress the heavy usage of Avicenna therein.⁷¹ Even so, we find no reason to deny that this text does represent Thomas's personal view. According to this text, therefore, divine science (metaphysics) is to be learned after the other sciences, though it is by nature first of all the sciences. Following Avicenna's lead, Thomas notes that it is to be learned after the natural sciences in which various things are determined which this science uses. Avicenna had listed the following illustrations: generation, corruption, alteration, place and time, the axiom that whatever is moved is moved by another, and an indication of those things which are moved with respect to the first mover.⁷² Thomas has abbreviated Avicenna's listing and omitted therefrom explicit reference to alteration, place and time, the axiom of motion, and the first mover. After citing generation and corruption he simply mentions motion and other things of this kind. For our immediate purposes it is important to note that Thomas does not say that metaphysics derives knowledge of its subject matter and/or justifies *separatio* by relying on the philosopher of nature.⁷³

Thomas has also indicated that metaphysics should be studied after mathematics. A knowledge of astronomy and hence of mathematics is required to enable one to arrive at knowledge of the number and of the order of the separate substances and therefore of the heavenly spheres. Again there is no indication that metaphysics depends on mathematics for knowledge of its starting point, being as being, or

⁷¹ "Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna on the Relationship between First Philosophy and the Other Theoretical Sciences: A Note on Thomas's *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 9," *Thomist* 37 (January 1973): 133–54.

⁷² For Avicenna see his *Metaphysica* 1, c. 3 (Venice, 1508, reprod. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1961), fol. 71Rb–71Va: "Ordo vero huius scientiae est ut discatur post scientias naturales et disciplinales. Sed post naturales, ideo, quia multa de his quae conceduntur in ista sunt de illis quae iam probata sunt in naturalis sicut generatio et corruptio, et alteritas, et locus, et tempus, et quod omne quod movetur ab alio movetur, et quae sunt ea quae moventur ad primum motorem, etc. Post disciplinales vero, ideo quia intentio ultima in hac scientia est cognitio gubernatoris Dei altissimi, et cognitio angelorum spiritualium et ordinum suorum, et cognitio ordinationis in comparatione circulorum, ad quam scientiam impossibile est perveniri nisi per cognitionem Astrologiae. Ad scientiam vero Astrologiae nemo potest pervenire nisi per scientiam Arithmeticae et Geometriae."

⁷³ Hence the appropriateness of Klubertanz's remark: "This text is as interesting for what it does not say as for what it says . . . St. Thomas does not say that metaphysics receives its object from the philosophy of nature" (op. cit., p. 10).

in order to justify *separatio*. Thomas's remarks about music, ethics, and the like obviously do not point to formal or intrinsic dependence of metaphysics upon these disciplines.

Then, in continuing dependency upon Avicenna, Thomas refutes the charge of circularity that might seem to follow from admitting that metaphysics both proves the principles of the other sciences and yet borrows some points from them. In his discussion of this he concentrates on the relationship between metaphysics and natural science. No vicious circle is involved because the principles which natural science receives from first philosophy are not used to prove those points which the first philosopher receives from the natural philosopher. Rather the latter (those points which the first philosopher takes from the natural philosopher) are proved by means of other self-evident principles. Moreover, the principles which the first philosopher gives to natural philosophy are not proved by means of principles borrowed therefrom, but by means of other self-evident principles.⁷⁴ Again, there is no indication in this text that first philosophy derives its starting point or subject from natural philosophy, or that *separatio* depends upon natural philosophy's proof of a First Mover. Indeed, if such were implied by this text, then one might well wonder whether or not the charge of a vicious circle had been evaded. One would have to show that the argument for the First Mover in physics did not itself employ principles derived from and proven in metaphysics and therefore dependent on prior knowledge of being in general or the subject of metaphysics.

In what appears to be another refutation of the charge of circularity, Thomas then introduces some further precisions:

Moreover, the sensible effects on which the demonstrations of natural science are based are more evident to us in the beginning. But when we come to know the first causes through them, these causes will reveal to us the reason for the effects, from which they were proved by a demonstration *quia*. In this way natural science also contributes something to divine science, and nevertheless it is divine science that explains its principles. That is why Boethius places divine science last, because it is last relative to us.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Decker ed., p. 172. 13–20. For discussion of two different ways in which this passage might be interpreted and for fuller justification of the reading followed here see our "Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna," pp. 142–46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172. 21–173. 4: "Praetera, effectus sensibiles, ex quibus procedunt demonstrationes naturales, sunt notiores quoad nos in principio, sed cum per eos pervenerimus ad cognitionem causarum primarum, ex eis apparebit nobis propter quid illorum effectuum, ex quibus probabantur demonstratione quia. Et sic et scientia naturalis aliquid tradit scientiae divinae,

Here Thomas reasons that the demonstrations of natural science are based on sensible effects, and that such effects are more evident to us in the beginning. He suggests that one can reason to knowledge of the “first causes” by means of these effects and that, having done so, knowledge of such causes will reveal the reason for the effects. Thus natural science contributes something to divine science, and at the same time the former’s principles are explained by the latter.

One might wonder what it is that natural science contributes to divine science, merely some knowledge of the sensible effects on which its (divine science’s) demonstrations are based, or also the discovery of the first cause by means of these effects.⁷⁶ It seems that the text could be interpreted either way. If natural science only contributes knowledge of those sensible effects which are then used by the metaphysician in his reasoning to the existence of first causes, there would be no evidence in this passage for thinking that Thomas would ground the starting point of metaphysics on natural philosophy’s demonstration of the First Mover. But if the demonstration *quia* or discovery of first causes is itself assigned to natural philosophy

et tamen per eam sua principia notificantur. Et inde est quod Boethius ultimo ponit scientiam divinam, quia est ultima quoad nos.” Maurer trans., pp. 17–18.

⁷⁶ As Owens has pointed out, the text states that it is through these sensible effects that one reaches knowledge of the first causes. “The text does not say that the first causes are reached by the demonstrations of natural philosophy.” See his “Aquinas and the Proof from the ‘Physics’,” p. 131. According to Owens: “In Aristotle, the separate substances are reached in metaphysics, in a process of reasoning that takes its starting point from the demonstrations of the eternity of the cosmic motion in natural philosophy.” In this peripatetic setting, natural philosophy would be of necessary help to metaphysics. But Thomas here uses the “neutral phrasing of ‘first causes’ instead of ‘separate substances’,” and hence can view the argumentation from sensible effects both as leading to first causes and as permitting natural philosophy to contribute something to metaphysics (pp. 131–32). Owens’s interpretation, if correct, would square nicely with the view that we have found elsewhere in Aquinas, that it is the business of metaphysics by metaphysical reasoning to establish the existence of the cause(s) or principle(s) of its subject. Still, one might take this text as implying that one may reason from sensible effects to a knowledge of first causes in natural philosophy itself. For this reading see our “Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna,” p. 147. Viewed in itself, the text appears to be open to either interpretation. If one assumes that by “first causes” in this discussion Thomas has in mind God, then of course the issue touched on above reappears, that is, whether the First Mover established in natural philosophy is to be identified, in Thomas’s eyes, with the Unmoved Mover of the *Metaphysics* (God). Without attempting to resolve that issue, however, it seems to us that neither interpretation of this passage forces one to conclude that Thomas would require a physical demonstration of the First Mover in order for one to begin metaphysics.

by this text, some doubt might remain. Still, even if one interprets it in this way, there is no indication here that metaphysics depends on natural philosophy's demonstration of a First Mover in order to begin its own investigations and, therefore, in order to establish its starting point, being as being. Hence, according to neither reading should this text be so construed. At most it might imply that in addition to receiving some help from natural philosophy with respect to the items Thomas had earlier itemized, metaphysics might benefit from the latter when it comes to *scientia quia* with respect to knowledge of the existence of (the) first cause(s). If one interprets it in the first way indicated above, not even this implication will follow from this passage. In sum, therefore, Thomas's reply to the ninth objection does not imply that metaphysics must receive its subject matter from natural philosophy or that the demonstration of the First Mover by the latter is a necessary condition for the metaphysician to discover being as being or for *separatio*.⁷⁷

It is true that in discussing the reasons for entitling this science "metaphysics" Thomas writes that it comes "to us after physics among subjects to be learned; for we have to proceed from sensible things to

⁷⁷ Klubertanz distinguishes between the part of metaphysics that deals with being and its immediate principles, and that part which treats of God. "With the possible exception of one point (that there are distinct kinds of change), the philosophy of nature is not a necessary presupposition" for the first part. But some conclusions of the philosophy of nature are "necessarily presupposed" for the second part. He cites the points listed by Avicenna and suggests that they are necessary for establishing certain "negative attributes of spiritual substances, such as the immutability, immensity, and eternity of God" (p. 13). For knowledge of separate substances he also suggests that Thomas would presuppose knowledge of the human intellect and cites *In 1 De anima*, l. 1 (Pirota ed. [Turin: Marietti, 1959] n. 7): "Quia si ad Philosophiam primam attendamus, non possumus devenire in cognitionem divinarum et altissimarum causarum, nisi per ea quae ex virtute intellectus possibilis acquirimus. Si enim natura intellectus possibilis esset nobis ignota, non possemus scire ordinem substantiarum separatarum, sicut dicit Commentator super *undecimo Metaphysicae*." While acknowledging that there are Aristotelian physical arguments in support of the axiom of motion and with respect to the things immediately moved by the First Mover (see Avicenna's list of physics' contributions to metaphysics), there are also metaphysical arguments for the same. It is to the metaphysical argumentation that Thomas turns, continues Klubertanz, except when he is "expounding the *Physics*" (p. 13). The fact that Thomas did not list these particular items in his abbreviation of Avicenna makes us wonder if he would indeed agree that metaphysics must borrow them from physics. But we are in fullest agreement with Klubertanz's contention that Thomas does not base his metaphysics on the philosophy of nature (p. 17). To determine Thomas's mind on this point is, of course, a major purpose of the present study.

those that are not sensible" (commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, question 5, article 1).⁷⁸ In question 6, article 1 of this same work he observes that this science is learned after physics and the other sciences because intellectual consideration is the terminus of rational consideration. Hence it is called "metaphysics" or *trans physicam* because it comes after physics according to the process of analysis (*resolutio*).⁷⁹ This reference to analysis or resolution reappears in the prooemium to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Here he writes that this science is called "metaphysics" because it considers being and its properties; for these transphysicals are discovered by the process of resolution just as the more universal is discovered after the less universal.⁸⁰

But it should also be noted that in question 5, article 1 of the commentary on the *De Trinitate* he refers to it as "first philosophy" insofar as the other sciences, deriving their principles from it, follow after it.⁸¹ Again in question 6, article 1 of this same work, he names it first philosophy for this same reason and, insofar as according to the process of composition or synthesis, intellectual consideration (which he has there associated especially with this science) is the "principle" of rational consideration (which he has associated with natural philosophy).⁸² These discussions obviously involve the difficult issue to which Thomas addressed himself in replying to the ninth objection of question 5, article 1 of the *De Trinitate*, that is, the different ways in which metaphysics can derive certain points from the other sciences and still contribute principles to the same. The distinction between resolution (analysis) and composition (synthesis) is also of importance with respect to that issue. But these passages do not state or imply that metaphysics must receive knowledge of the existence of the First or Unmoved Mover from physics so as to be able to discover its own subject, being as being, by means of *separatio*.⁸³

⁷⁸ Maurer trans., pp. 8–9. See the Decker ed., p. 166. 2–4: "quae alio nomine dicitur metaphysica, id est trans physicam, quia post physicam discenda occurrit nobis, quibus ex sensibilibus oportet in insensibilia devenire."

⁷⁹ Decker ed., p. 212. 22–25.

⁸⁰ "Haec enim transphysica inveniuntur in via resolutionis, sicut magis communia post minus communia" (p. 2).

⁸¹ Decker ed., p. 166. 4–6.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 212. 20–22.

⁸³ For discussion of the different reasons offered by Thomas for entitling this science "first philosophy" in the commentary on the *De Trinitate*, on the one hand, and in the commentary on the *Metaphysics*, on the other,

In sum, therefore, in Thomas's mind there were strong pedagogical indications suggesting that metaphysics be studied after physics. As regards the order of learning, one should move from the easier to the more difficult, from the more concrete to the more abstract, from the more particular to the more universal. Moreover, certain points developed by physics might be of value to particular areas of metaphysical investigation. Nonetheless, with the exception of the difficult texts drawn from his commentary on *Metaphysics* 6 and 11 and analyzed above, we have not found Thomas stating or implying that one *must* presuppose the existence of positively immaterial being in order to begin metaphysics. On the contrary, we have found such a suggestion countered by his own view that it is the business of metaphysics to reason to the existence of the principles of its subject. Far from presupposing the existence of an Unmoved Mover or of God as given to it by physics, his personal view rather is that it is the task and goal of metaphysics to establish the same. Hence we have concluded that it is historically defensible to suggest that for Aquinas the possibility of metaphysics and, therefore, the possibility of *separatio* need not rest on a prior demonstration of a First Mover or Unmoved Mover in physics. Those texts just referred to from his commentary on *Metaphysics* 6 and 11 that point to the opposite should, therefore, in our opinion, be viewed as his interpretation of Aristotle's text but not as his personal view.

III

If the above is an historically defensible interpretation of Thomas's personal thought on *separatio* and the subject of metaphysics, another and more speculative issue remains. Within the framework of his metaphysical perspective is it possible for one to make a grounded judgment of separation, to distinguish that by reason of which something is described as being from that by reason of which it is described as being of a given kind, without presupposing prior awareness that positively immaterial being exists in fact?

In considering this issue, certain points should be recalled. First of all, one is interested in arriving at a notion of being as being that might serve as subject of a science of being as being rather than at a notion of being that is restricted to the material and changeable. Secondly, according to Thomas himself, it is quite possible for one to study

and his use of the distinction between resolution and composition with respect to the same see n. 53 above and our study cited there and in n. 11.

material being in metaphysics, not insofar as it is subject to change, but insofar as it is being.⁸⁴ Thirdly, when giving what one may regard as illustrations of *separatio*, Thomas at times implies that things discovered thereby are without matter and motion. At other times he writes that they can be without matter and motion.⁸⁵ It is our contention that awareness of the latter (the negatively immaterial) is sufficient for him to arrive at a metaphysical notion of being, a notion that will serve as subject of the science in question. Finally, we have contended above that recourse to prior knowledge of the existence of a spiritual human soul, or even of a besouled first mover of the universe will not of itself be sufficient to prove that being, in order to be such, need not be material and *changing*. In short, if one can only justify separation by moving from prior awareness that the kind of being pointed to by this judgment does in fact exist, appeal to spiritual but changing being will not, of itself, prove that being, in order to be such, need not be changing.

Given these considerations, then, we would invite the reader to reflect upon the distinctive intelligibilities implied by two different kinds of questions that may be raised. One question searches for that by reason of which something may be recognized as being or as real. Another searches for that by reason of which something is recognized as a given kind of being. If one is justified in distinguishing these two questions and therefore these two intelligibilities from one another, one should then be in position to make this judgment: that by reason of which something is recognized as being need not be identified with or restricted to that by reason of which it is recognized as being of a given kind. (In fact, to deny this would be to deny that there can be different kinds of being, a conclusion that runs counter to our experience of different kinds of being, for instance, non-living beings, living beings, canine beings, human beings, etc.) But to be recognized as material and changing is to be recognized as enjoying a given

⁸⁴ See *In 6 Met.*, n. 1165: "Advertendum est autem, quod licet ad considerationem primae philosophiae pertineant ea quae sunt separata secundum esse et rationem a materia et motu, non tamen solum ea; sed etiam de sensibilibus, in quantum sunt entia, Philosophus perscrutatur. Nisi forte dicamus, ut Avicenna dicit, quod huiusmodi communia de quibus haec scientia perscrutatur, dicuntur separata secundum esse, non quia semper sint sine materia; sed quia non de necessitate habent esse in materia, sicut mathematica."

⁸⁵ See the texts cited from q. 5, a. 3 of the commentary on the *De Trinitate* cited above in nn. 22, 28, and 29; and from q. 5, a. 4 of the same work, as cited in nn. 58 and 59.

kind of being. Therefore, being, in order to be recognized as such, need not be recognized as material and changing. Here, then, one has formulated a negative judgment or *separatio*, and one should now be in position to study being simply as being rather than as non-living or living or canine or human or as material and changing. The fact that one can, according to Thomas, study any kind of being, including material being, in metaphysics suggests that this procedure is not at odds with his understanding of the conditions required to ground the science in question.

In light of this negative judgment, therefore, it would seem that in order for being to be realized as such, it need not be realized as material and changing. If, then, in the subsequent course of one's metaphysical investigations, one concludes to the existence of an immaterial and/or unchanging being, then one will be justified in predicating, albeit analogically, one's notion of being of it, a notion already grasped by means of the judgment of separation and presupposing an initial discovery of being based on a positive judgment of existence. According to this view, then, the notion of being that is achieved by separation need not presuppose previous knowledge of the existence of the human soul or of the First Mover of the *Physics* and/or of God. This notion is transcendental in this sense that it has been freed from restriction to any given kind of being, including the material and changeable.⁸⁶

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⁸⁶ Most if not all of the authors cited above who find Aquinas grounding the very possibility of metaphysics and of *separatio* on prior knowledge that positively immaterial being exists would, of course, differ with our position. On the other hand, Klubertanz appears to go to the opposite extreme: "Hence, it is illusory to attempt to base a knowledge of being as being on the demonstrated existence of immaterial things. Either 'is' is freed from its sensible and changing context (prior to the proof of the existence of immaterial being, and thus is meaningful when we conclude to the existence of such being) or 'is' remains as we first find it immersed in sensibility and change. In the latter case, 'is' means 'is sensible, material and changeable', and to assert that 'An immaterial, immobile thing is sensible, material and changeable' is a contradiction" (*Introduction to The Philosophy of Being*, p. 52, n. 28). In our opinion it may be possible for one to reason from knowledge of the existence of positively immaterial and immobile being to the discovery of being as being (against Klubertanz), but this is not the only way of discovering being as being (in agreement with Klubertanz here and against the more traditional view).